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The socially acceptable behavioural patterns in children with intellectual disabilities

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Abstract

The aim of our research is closely linked to determining social behaviour through an estimation of perception of adequate social patterns and their practical application. The next level of estimation encompasses identification of elementary factors, which are statistically closely related to the behaviour of children with mild intellectual disorders. Our research shows that almost 50% of our tested sample exhibits inappropriate forms of social behaviour. A correlative analysis between behaviour and age, as well as school achievement, points to a statistically significant relation. The practical implications of this theory would show that the educator must identify inappropriate patterns of behaviour in every child, in order to define a treatment that must comprise excellent child motivation, trust in the self and in the educator, certainty that this is the only goal that children find interesting, attractive and in accordance with their individual capabilities, needs and possibilities.

Keywords: social behaviour, mild intellectual disorder, age

Introduction

The most significant segment during the process of educational rehabilitation of children with mild intellectual disorders has to encompass adequate forms of socialization and adaptation of such children into the social environment. Adaptation to the social group represents a very complex developmental path, whose main aim is the adequate acquisition of knowledge, values and patterns of behaviour. The process of socialization represents the interaction of any individual with the environment; it is a process of social acquisition during which an individual accepts socially relevant patterns of behaviour, thus forming the personality, with all of its distinguishing characteristics. Children with mild intellectual disorders acquire patterns of behaviour through role models, i.e. through perceiving and imitating parents, teachers and educators. Whether someone will acquire adequate behavioural patterns or not, directly depends on this person's immediate environment. The environment greatly impacts the area of emotional and social development, from both the aspect of satisfying a child's basic needs and developing certain positive emotional relationships with objects, persons and events in the immediate environment.

Already in early childhood, children with mild intellectual disorders lag behind other children of their age, when it comes to sensorimotor development, development of speech, motorics and cognition, which leads to

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inappropriate social contacts. The quality of developed perception and attention, which are basic elements of cognitive functioning, defines to a great extent the behaviour and social functioning of children with mild intellectual disorders. Behavioural problems and social functioning in children with mild intellectual disorders are more frequent than in children from the typical population, the reason for which we can find in diminished cognitive powers and inadequate social environment.

Children with mild intellectual disorders exhibit a lower level of social interaction compared to children of their age from the general population. The reasons for this some authors attribute to the diminished cognitive and emotional capabilities of these children. (Dosen, et. al., 2001; Dosen, 2000), while other researches support the thesis that the child's family determines the social adaptability of a child to a great extent (Patterson et. al., 1992). Therefore, outmost emphasis must be placed on the family climate, where the child spends most of its time and acquires many important cognitive patterns, which will represent the foundation for creating adequate social relationships.

Contemporary psychologists place emphasis on the cognitive processes, which they define as the mediator between the environment and an individual's behaviour. When interacting with the environment, an individual is not a mere passive observer, but an active participant that defines adequate behaviour based on his/her past experience. It is therefore important for a person to choose, interpret, remember and utilize social information in his/her contact with the surroundings.

Having in mind that children with mild intellectual disorders have a low potential for cognitive capabilities that define perception and adequate reaction, i.e. socially accepted behaviour, the basic problem in our work can be formulated through the question: what is the percentage of young school children with mild intellectual disorders who will react to situations in a socially acceptable way?

Based on the formulated research problem, objectives were set for our research project, which are as follows:

Ascertain the quality of development of socially acceptable behaviour in children with mild intellectual disorders

Ascertain the relationship between behaviour and school achievement in children with mild intellectual disorders

Ascertain the relationship between behaviour and age groups in children with mild intellectual disorders

Ascertain the relationship between behaviour and IQ in children with mild intellectual disorders

Practical implications of this study pertain to establishing the percentage of socially acceptable behaviour in children with mild intellectual disorders, in order to organize and carry out an adequate educational rehabilitative treatment of children with mild intellectual disorders of young age.

1. Sample

A random sample, which was the basis for research, encompassed 93 school children of both genders. The criteria for selecting participants involved the following requirements:

- IQ range of 50 to 90, estimated through the WISC scale of intellectual capabilities
- Age range between 8years & 5months and 12years & 3months
- School age between grades 2 and 4
- No neurological, psychiatric, sensor and combined disorders

Research was carried out at primary schools for children with mild mental retardation on the territory of Belgrade.

2. Study Method

In accordance with the theoretical concept of work, the following research instrument was used:

A behaviour estimate was made using the AAMS scale of adaptive behaviour for children and adults (American Association on Mental Deficiency, 1974). The scale comprises of a number of questions, which describe how the subject behaves in various situations. The scale was made by teachers in direct contact with children from the research sample. The rating was done according to the instruction that came with the scale (AAMD, 1974).

Other data required for our study that relates to the level of intellectual functioning (IQ), age range and school age, were acquired through a standard analysis of pedagogical documentation.

The acquired results are presented in tabular and graphic form. Analysis of gathered data was processed using different models of parametric and non-parametric statistics. A unified database was formed using the obtained data with the help of SPSS software along with the processing of the data. Information acquired through our research was processed with the following statistical procedures and methods:

- Frequencies
- Percentages
- Arithmetic mean
- Standard deviation
- Calculating variability measures
- T Test and its significance
- Course of testing and means of research

The test was performed in continuity, not in phases and pause intervals. All of the subjects performed the same test. The testing was performed at the Belgrade primary schools for children with mild intellectual disorders. The selection of subjects was done according to the above mentioned research criteria, taking special care that the sample is as representative as possible. All given data were scored, entered into data matrices and statistically processed.

3. Results

Table 1. Estimated scores of adequate adoption of social behaviour in children with mild intellectual disorders

successful	unsuccessful
57%	43%

After examining the sample, results showed a notably higher rate of successful subjects on the test evaluates adequate social behaviour (57% successful and 43% unsuccessful).

Table 2 - Values of related variables between adequate socially acceptable behaviour and overall school age (OSA), age (A), intelligence coefficient (IQ)

adequate socially acceptable behaviour / (OSA)	t = 4,064	df =91	Sig. 0,000
adequate socially acceptable behaviour / (A)	t = 3,496	df =91	Sig. 0,001
adequate socially acceptable behaviour / IQ	t = 1,938	df =91	Sig. 0,056

Research shows that there is a statistically significant correlation between socially acceptable behavioural patterns and school achievement in general, as well as age, while no statistically significant correlation was identified when it comes to the relation between behaviour and the coefficient of intellectual functioning. Among all variables set, the average school achievement is the most important factor in children with mild intellectual disorders.

4. Discussion

The results obtained in our study show that more than 50% of subjects from our sample demonstrate balanced behavioural patterns. However, 43% are unable to demonstrate adequate forms of behaviour. Our next observation pertains to the fact that the tested variable is directly influenced by school achievement and the age of the subjects. This information proves a well known fact that socialization as a process depends on acquisition and learning, regardless how large the role of inherited general human and individual characteristics and their constant maturation (Zivkovic, 2004).

Modern literature points to the fact that imitating behaviour of others and looking up to their varying reactions is an important source of social behaviour. A child playing with objects learns many grown-up activities, by imitating the adult way of dealing with the same objects and tools intended for them – while psychoanalysts discuss symbolic behaviour that represents the externalization of wishes. Literature intended for children contains numerous good and evil (heroes) characters. Heroes are there to serve as role models and evil ones demonstrate the type of behaviour that should be avoided. Both represent ways to reflect social norms of behaviour (Zivkovic, 2004).

Social cognition, as a main topic of this study, envelops one of the most complex areas of modern social psychology research. We could reason that it's the way in which people think about themselves and the social world. It also represents a special conceptual level of analysis. Researchers working in this area use mental constructions at the level of individual thoughts, categories and terms in order to explain the cognitive activity that accompanies and encompasses social behaviour. Adequate social behaviour of an individual is directly conditioned by schemes, processing of information and the depth or type of processing (Zlatanovic, 2006).

Our research shows that adequate social behaviour in children with mild intellectual disorders among other factors depends on general school achievement and the age of subjects. This piece of information should steer the education rehabilitation process, which must be directed in such a way that it "imposes" socially accepted patterns of behaviour on school children. In that respect, we can also state that the time spent in school should be longer for children who do not show adequate social behaviour. It is of outmost importance that in children with mild intellectual disorders we influence the development of *self-efficacy*, because competent functioning requires harmony between the sureness of ones own capabilities and the actual possession of capabilities and knowledge. If the child has an awareness of his/her own activities, this will positively reflect on the control of his/her own thoughts and actions (Bandura, 1986; Tubic, 2005). Interaction between social environment and behaviour in children with mild intellectual disorders has to be two-fold and such that the child is both the creator and product of the social environment.

Behaviour is therefore a multiplicative function that encompasses the following components (Pintrich, Schunk, 1996):

- Probability of success
- Motive and
- Attractiveness of the goal

This model is acceptable for children with mild intellectual disorders. The practical implications of this theory would show that the educator must identify inappropriate patterns of behaviour in every child, in order to define a treatment that must comprise excellent child motivation, trust in the self and in the educator, certainty that this is the only goal that children find interesting, attractive and in accordance with their individual capabilities, needs and possibilities.

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